

Local Child Care Planning Councils

BACKGROUND

In 1991, Assemblymember Jackie Speier authored AB 2141 (Chapter 1187) which created Local Child Care Planning Councils in each county. AB 2141 authorized these local councils to determine local child care needs, to develop priorities for the allocation of federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds, and to prepare a county-wide child care plan.

The advent of federal and state welfare reform in combination with a devolution of responsibility to counties to create and administer welfare programs has impacted the role of local child care planning councils. Chapter 270, Statutes of 1997 (AB 1542) created a new welfare program In California: California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs). This same legislation also strengthened the role of local child care planning councils.

Strengthened Role of Local Planning Councils

Local child care planning councils continue to determine local community child care needs through the development of needs assessments and county-wide child care plans. These councils have a greater role in developing quality, accessible child care.

Child care is a key component of the CalWORKs welfare program, which attempts to move families to economic self-sufficiency. Although the authorizing legislation for local planning councils is found in the CalWORKs legislation (AB 1542), local planning councils are mandated to work with a variety of local players in addition to those connected with the welfare system to build a comprehensive child care approach to all families. Those encouraged to participate in the local planning process include:

- Subsidized and nonsubsidized child care providers;
- County welfare departments;
- Head Start;
- Local education agencies;
- Job training programs;
- Employers;
- Integrated child and family service councils;
- Parent organizations; and
- Other interested parties.

Additional new responsibilities of local child care planning councils include:

- Design a system to consolidate local child care waiting lists;
- Coordinate part-day programs, including State Preschool and Head Start, with other child care to provide full-day care;
- Review and comment on proposals submitted to the California Department of Education (CDE) for child care services in that county;
- Approve one to two persons from each council to review and score contract applications submitted for another county;
- Provide consultation to the CDE and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) on developing a single application and intake form.

AUTHORITY AND FUNDING

At the State level, local child care planning councils received \$2.4 million in federal quality improvement funds to implement their activities during 1997/98. These funds are administered under a contractual agreement by the CDE. The CDE allocates funds based on county population. Small counties receive \$30,000; mid-sized counties receive \$50,000, and Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego receiving the remainder over \$50,000. Each council is required to provide a match to the funding of approximately 25 percent.

In addition, the Child Development Policy Advisory Committee (CDPAC) provides technical assistance and training to local child care planning councils. One component of this technical assistance includes an annual statewide conference for local child care planners.

At the local level, both the County Board of Supervisors and the County Superintendent of Schools have authority to appoint members, establish terms of appointments, and review and approve needs assessments and local priorities as proposed by the local planning council. The Board of Supervisors and the Superintendent also are responsible for selecting representatives from the council to review and score child care applications submitted to the CDE.

MEMBERSHIP

Chapter 270, Statutes of 1997 (AB 1542) encourages diverse representation on local child care planning councils while maintaining a balance of different interests. Membership is grouped into the following categories:

20 percent child care providers, defined as persons who provide child care services or who represents persons who provide child care services, and reflective of the range of providers in the county (e.g. family child care, center-based, etc.).

20 percent community representatives, defined as persons who represent agencies or businesses that provide private child care funding for child care services, or who advocate for child care services through participation in a civic or community-based organization but does not provide child care.

20 percent consumers, defined as persons who receive, or who has received within the past 36 months, child care services.

20 percent public agency representatives, including a city, county, city and county, or local education agency.

20 percent at the discretion of the appointing agencies. These may or may not include representatives from the aforementioned categories.

COUNCIL ACTIVITY

A survey performed by CDPAC in 1994 found that in many counties, local planning councils had become inactive once they fulfilled their mandate of identifying priorities for expending federal block grant funds. Three problems were cited as causes: lack of leadership, lack of funding, and lack of clarity regarding future purpose. Councils called for greater leadership and technical assistance as well as more funding in order to carry out their mandates.

In response, the CDE issued \$660,000 in one-time federal block grant carry-over funds to assist local planning councils. Until this allocation in 1994, local planning councils were unfunded. The additional allocation of \$660,000 was intended to assist councils with their increased role in child care planning. Many councils had indicated their plans to hire staff and develop other innovative program strategies with their grant funds.

A follow-up survey in August 1997 discovered that many local planning councils had performed a variety of initiatives in their community. Councils in the counties of

Alameda, El Dorado, Los Angeles, and Orange, for example, organized community input forums on the impact of welfare reform and child care. The San Joaquin County local planning council held Leadership Development Training, and the planning council within the rural county of Inyo issued grants to family child care providers to allow them to attend training. Reaching outside of the child care community, Solano County's local planning council collaborated with health officials to access funds for respite child care.

PENDING ISSUES

Council Input on Proposals: Local planning councils are directed by law to provide input into child care proposals submitted to the CDE. The availability of local planning resources, adequate preparation time, and direction from CDE are crucial to providing useful input. The more accurate the information provided by the local planning councils to CDE, the better CDE can target funding that permits new contractors to enter the subsidized child care system, thereby expanding access for families.

Waiting Lists: AB 1542 mandates councils to develop consolidated waiting lists. Councils in Napa, Orange and Tulare counties have already implemented or are in the process of implementing consolidated waiting lists for child care services. It is unclear whether councils will also receive the resources to enable them to develop and implement a consolidated waiting list within their county.

CONCLUSION

Importantly, local child care planning councils are not a new entity created by CalWORKs or AB 1542—rather, the council role is strengthened and formalized. While many councils may be waiting for directives and timelines from the Legislature or the CDE, other councils have pushed forward as innovative instigators of change and activity to meet local community child care needs. Local planning councils are encouraged to communicate across county borders and across conventional child care ties to develop comprehensive, community-based strategies to serve children and families.
